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SHORT NOTES ON SOUL-TRAPPING IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA.

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THE object of the present communication¹ is to record certain observations concerning the trapping of a man's *ukpõñ*, or bush-soul as it is more commonly called, in the Efik area, southern Nigeria, West Africa. The whole question of the religious beliefs of the natives of certain tribes in southern Nigeria appears to be a complex one, more especially with regard to their ideas concerning the functions of the soul.² In the present paper I propose to refer only to that entity which has been called the "bush-soul."

According to Miss Kingsley,² the Efik believe that every person is endowed with four distinct souls,³ one of which is external and dwells in wild-beast form. This external soul may only exist in any wild animal, but never in one domesticated or in a plant.⁴

In order that a man may know the nature of his bush-soul, he invokes the aid of a wizard, who, according to the amount of payment given, will designate any animal he thinks may be desired. Thereafter the connection between the man and the animal is both close and intimate. For example, a leopard was captured in Old Town, Calabar, on the 18th of October, 1915, and an old man appeared before the authorities and claimed that the animal was the possessor of his bush-soul. He begged that it might be released, but permission was refused. He then asked that he might be allowed to measure it with a length of rope, and as a final request asked that he might be allowed to strike it with his fist before it was shot. All these requests were recognized as subterfuges, in order to allow the animal to escape when the door of the cage was opened.

¹ The information contained in these notes was collected at Calabar in 1918. For permission to consult his notes I have to thank the Rev. J. K. MacGregor of that town.

² J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Balder the Beautiful, 2 (1913) : 204-206; (Miss) M. Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (1897), 459-461; J. Parkinson, "Notes on the Efik Belief in Bush-soul" (*Man*, 6 [1906] : No. 80); A. E. Crawley, *The Idea of the Soul*, 1909.

³ Ankermann does not consider that the Efik have four souls. He says, "Ich halte diese Teilung für irrtümlich und verweise demgegenüber auf die zitierte Bemerkung Nassaus über die verschiedenen Erscheinungsformen der Seele; die erste, dritte und vierte Seele Miss Kingsleys sind jedenfalls eine und dasselbe."—"Totenkult und Seelenglaube bei Afrikanischen Völkern" (*Zeitschr. für Ethnol.*, 1918 : 112).

⁴ J. G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, 205.

Concerning the Efik belief in the external soul, Goldie¹ says that the "*ukpong* is the native word we have taken to translate our word 'soul.' It primarily signifies the shadow of a person. It also signifies that which dwells within a man, on which his life depends, but which may detach itself from the body, and, visiting places here and there, again return to its abode in the man. Besides all this, the word is used to designate an animal possessed of an *ukpong*, so connected with a person's *ukpong*, so they mutually act upon each other. When the leopard or crocodile, or whatever animal may be a man's *ukpong*, gets sick or dies, the like thing happens to him. Many individuals, it is believed, have the power of changing into the animals which are their *ukpong*."

To trap a man's soul, the wizard (*abiaiidiõñ*) learns from all possible sources what are his proposed victim's chief desires. This is done generally by an enemy, who conveys the information to the wizard. The two then go to a secluded spot in the forest. A cock is held up by the wizard, and the soul is called to come for the thing which is most desired. Sometimes this is the name of a favored girl, some particular food, or material wealth. The wizard then holds up a wooden dish (*aqua*); and if the soul has not come and lodged in it, use must be made of some other favored desire. When the wizard considers that the *ukpõñ* is in the dish, it is speared.

As a man has an animal as well as a human *ukpõñ*, it is the former which is trapped and speared. If the *ukpõñ* of a leopard is sought, parts of the body of this animal would be used to trap it. Sometimes the *ukpõñ* is not killed outright, but only wounded. In such a case the man whose *ukpõñ* has been trapped will become seriously ill. If the *ukpõñ* is killed, then the human *ukpõñ* will sever its connection with the man's body and go straight to the home of the dead (*obio ekpo*). There is thus a real and sympathetic relationship between the animal and its *ukpõñ*. It is the latter which is captured by the wizard, the animal itself remaining in the forest. It is believed that only a wizard can see the *ukpõñ*, and it is not every wizard who has the ability to trap it.

When the *ukpõñ* has been injured, the man affected immediately makes inquiries, and consults a rival wizard, who, by means of "medicine," endeavors to find out who has trapped the *ukpõñ*. In one way or another, in which money may be spent freely, the identity of the trapper is ascertained. In many cases a family feud results after a man's *ukpõñ* has been injured. If the guilty person is found, he is forced to undergo the *mbiam* test, and be judged by the tribal authorities. If all the facts are not brought to light, the wizard is compelled to reveal the whole affair.

¹ H. Goldie, Calabar and its Mission (Edinburgh and London, 1901), 51-52.

It is possible for a man to have more than one animal *ukpöñ*; but this is not common, except in the case of chiefs. Bush-souls may also be inherited.

An *ukpöñ* may be purchased, but in no case may a man have more than one inherited and one purchased *ukpöñ*. To purchase an *ukpöñ* the wizard is approached, and informed of the man's desire, and on the payment of a heavy sum of money this desire is generally gratified. It may be used to make a man strong or rich, or to harm a rival or enemy. For example, the owner of a large flock of sheep or goats is envied by a neighbor, who purchases a leopard *ukpöñ*, which will result in the real animal destroying them. In this way the power of the purchased *ukpöñ* may be stronger than that of the inherited one, because it can be chosen for a definite purpose. If a man enjoys good or indifferent health, if he is poor or rich, it is all the result of his having a corresponding *ukpöñ*. The inherited *ukpöñ* may die; and in this case the man will weaken, but not die. If the purchased *ukpöñ* dies, then the man will weaken and die.

The animal *ukpöñ* is transferable. If a man has a bush-cat (*ikiko*) *ukpöñ*, and it is trapped, "medicine" is made in order that the trapper may become forgetful. If the actual animal dies, then its *ukpöñ* may be transferred to some other animal. I was unable to find out what are the beliefs concerning the duality of the *ukpöñ* in animals.

Frazer¹ says that when a man dies, then the animal which contains his external soul "becomes insensible and quite unconscious of the approach of danger. Thus a hunter can capture or kill him with ease."

It is believed that everything, both animate and inanimate, is endowed with an *ukpöñ*. Thus, when a chief died in the Efik area, he was buried with his women slaves and personal belongings, the *ukpöñ* of all these being believed necessary to the comfort of the chief's ghost in the home of the dead (*obio ekpo*). Included among the slaves was the woman (*akani ukpohori*) who tended the late chief's boxes and kept the key of his money-box. Her right hand was bored, and the keys thrust through the opening; the woman who tended the lights had a native lamp attached to her right hand in a like manner. In addition to slaves, all the late chief's personal belongings were buried with his body, in order that their *ukpöñ* might accompany his ghost to the home of the dead.

The explanation of the Efik belief in the bush-soul is somewhat difficult to understand. Frazer² considers that here we seem to have something like the personal totem "on its way to become hereditary, and so grow into the totem of a clan."

Ankermann considers that the evidence at present is insufficient,

¹ J. G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, 205-206.

² *Ibid.*, 222 (note).

but that there appear to be traces of sex totemism. Further, if, as Frazer¹ thinks from information supplied by Mr. Henshaw, a man may only marry a woman with the same sort of bush-soul, then we have an example of totemic endogamy.

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¹ J. G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, 205. “. . . A man may only marry a woman who has the same sort of bush-soul as himself; for example, if his bush-soul is a leopard, his wife must also have a leopard for her bush-soul. Further, we learn . . . that a person's bush-soul need not be that either of his father or of his mother. For example, a child with a hippopotamus for his bush-soul may be born into a family, all the members of which have wild pigs for their bush-souls; this happens when the child is a reincarnation of a man whose external soul was a hippopotamus.”